

## CLASSIFICATION OFFICE DECISION

**Title of publication:** Into The River

**Other known title(s):** Not stated

**OFLC ref:** 1300727.000

**Medium:** Book

**Author:** Ted Dawe

**Publisher:** Mangakino University Press

**Country of origin:** New Zealand

**Language:** English, Māori

**Applicant:** Secretary for Internal Affairs

<b>Classification:</b>	Unrestricted: Suitable for mature audiences 16 years of age and over.
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**Descriptive note:** Contains sex scenes, offensive language and drug use.

**Display conditions:** None

**Date of entry in Register:** 11 September 2013

**Date of direction to issue a label:** 11 September 2013

**Date of notice of decision:** 11 September 2013

### Summary of reasons for decision:

'Into The River' is a young adult novel from New Zealand/Aotearoa. The novel is centred on Te Arepa Santos, a boy from a fictional village on the East Coast of the North Island. Te Arepa wins a scholarship to a boys' boarding school in Auckland. The transition is difficult. He forges friendships, finds enemies, and discovers that his Maori identity is discounted and a disadvantage. He endures the bullying that comes from this, as well as that meted out to new boys, and sees what happens when that bullying goes too far. At school, Te Arepa grapples with serious competition, hard work and success. Holidays and term breaks are also full of learning. His friends' families provide stark and often uncomfortable contrasts to his East Coast roots and values. Along the way, there are confusing encounters with sex and a growing understanding of intimacy, the use of drugs, peer pressure, deep racism, grief and death.

The book deals with some stronger content. There are sexual relationships between teenagers, encounters with possible child sexual exploitation, the use of illegal drugs and other criminal

activities, violent assault, and a moderate level of highly offensive language. These are well contextualised within an exciting fast moving narrative that has as its protagonist, a young teenage Maori boy from a rural community who is finding his way through the strange uncomfortable environment of a boys' boarding school and unfamiliar social mores. The story captures the raw and real extremes of adolescence in teenage boys. The content immerses the reader in action, wit, and intrigue, as well as a level of social realism, all likely to engage teen and young adult readers and with particular appeal for older boys and young men.

The content to do with matters of sex and crime does not automatically require restriction. A reader with the maturity to read a text-dense novel is likely to have the maturity to deal with the contents. Readers must also make a conscious decision to engage with the book, and the usual browsing behaviours will influence their choice to continue to a more comprehensive level. Unlike film or television, a book does not make a sudden and colourful impression on naive viewers.

It is clearly acknowledged by the author and by expert literary reviewers that the book is intended for a more mature audience. There are many other novels widely available without restriction in New Zealand with similar sexual descriptions of an equivalent nature, many of them literary classics and coming of age novels, or popular fiction phenomena in their own right. This would make a restriction on 'Into The River' arbitrary and unfair. It would create a widespread inconsistency in conditions of access to books of this nature. Concerns about children or young persons are adequately addressed by a classification indicating the book's suitability for mature audiences and a label that indicates sexual content. This has already been addressed by some booksellers, which indicates a reasonable and conscious responsibility taken by marketers to warn parents and caregivers and thus provide protection for children and young people.

The Classification Office has taken into account the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 (NZBR Act) when making this decision. While it is acknowledged that some people may be offended by reading parts of this book, the NZBR Act states that everyone has the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and opinions of any kind in any form. Under s5 of the NZBR Act, this freedom is subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society. Any restriction on the availability of this publication would not be a reasonable limitation nor demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.